



Willimantic River Alliance, Inc.

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March 7, 2014

To: Co-chairs of the Environment Committee, Edward Meyer and Linda Gentile

From: Meg Reich, President and Pat Bresnahan, Secretary

Subject: **HB 5424, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE WATER PLANNING COUNCIL.**

In this testimony, the Willimantic River Alliance (WRA) would like to 1) strongly support the need for a statewide water supply plan and 2) express our concerns that HB5424 as written may not adequately address this need.

1.) The need for statewide water planning. Our members have been very involved in planning for a new, additional source of drinking water for UCONN and the Storrs section of the town of Mansfield over the past few years. When we realized that Connecticut had no statewide plan and that the Water Utility Coordinating Committee (WUCC) for northeastern Connecticut had never been convened, we began to advocate for a better process than currently exists.

The existing WUCC process, created almost three decades ago, would not have served very well in our circumstances, even if our region's WUCC membership had been convened to help us select a new source of water supply. The geographic region delineated for the Northeast WUCC included only one of the potential identified three surface water supply sources- the Town of Windham's Willimantic Reservoir in Mansfield and Windham. The other two potential water sources studied were outside of the NE WUCC. The Connecticut Water Company's (CWC) Shenipsit Reservoir is in Ellington, Tolland and Vernon and straddles the Upper CT River WUCC in central Connecticut and the NE WUCC; the Metropolitan District Commission's (MDC) Barkhamsted and Nepaug Reservoirs in the Farmington River watershed basin, lie within the watershed within the Northwest Hills WUCC.

In order to include these three potential water sources and affected communities, all three WUCC's across the entire northern tier of the state, would have had to be involved. More than 75 cities and towns would have needed to participate in a two year long WUCC process.

The process that was used, however, with the town of Mansfield and the University of Connecticut undertaking separate planning processes, for their separate but overlapping needs, and then joining together in preparing an Environmental Impact Evaluation to study common options, was not an appropriate means to an end, either. Farmington River and Hockanum River communities only became aware of the project in Storrs because of the media. Scoping meetings and public hearings did not lend themselves to the wide geographic impacts of this project. It was a project that had potential impacts for the entire northern half of the state. This is why the Willimantic River Alliance recommends that a new statewide water supply plan and process is needed.

2.) Concerns about HB5424. We concur with the views and testimony of the Rivers Alliance of Connecticut with respect to HB 5424. We would, however, like to emphasize the need for more clarity in the proposed legislation with respect to the scope and governance issues related to water supply planning. In particular, the legislation should:

- Clarify the authority of a statewide water supply plan as it would relate to the State Plan of Conservation and Development and to individual water supply plans.
- Explicitly acknowledge that both surface and ground water resources are subject to water supply planning

- More clearly identify the specific objectives of the plan, and its contents
- Direct the Water Planning Council to develop a planning process that follows the principles of the Water Allocation Policy and Planning Model developed by the WPC subcommittees in 2002 and subsequently endorsed by the legislature.
- Explicitly direct that this planning process should be conducted in conjunction with regional stakeholder groups and that these groups be given the authority to act as full members of a decision making body with respect to the use of the water resources in their region. The participation of stakeholders should go beyond merely submitting comments.

We would like to thank Rep. John Hampton and the members of his water planning subcommittees for maintaining the statewide momentum on such an important statewide issue.

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